



Riverside Public Library

Veteran's History Project

Richard L. Savage
Lt. Col. United States Air Force (Ret.)
Served in the Korean War, Cold War, and Vietnamese Conflict

Interviewed on 29 January 2003
at the Riverside Public Library, Riverside, California

Colbert: This interview is with Richard Savage, a retired Lt. Col. in the United States Air Force. My name is Bruce Colbert and today is the 29th of January 2003. This interview is taking place at the Riverside Public Library in Riverside, California, as part of the Riverside Veterans' History Project, a Riverside Public Library partnership with the Library of Congress.

Colbert: What is your full name, please.

Savage: Richard L. Savage, but I go by Dick.

Colbert: Where were you born and raised?

Savage: Born in Los Angeles, grew up there 'til I was thirteen and then moved to Manhattan Beach.

Colbert: O.K. You were just getting ready to go into high school at that time, then? And what's your educational background when you joined the service?

Savage: When I joined the service, just high school.

Colbert: So your civilian occupation then was primarily as a student.

Savage: I was right out of high school, but I joined in January '43.

Colbert: So you went into the Army Air Corps?

Savage: Yeah, I sure did. Went to basic training at Keesler Field. I went to Fort McArthur and they sent me down to Keesler Field through some classification thing, so I ended up down there. And after basic training, I went into the AM (aircraft mechanic) school down at Keesler Field. It was a school for B-24's, the four-engine bomber of World War II. And about halfway through that school I thought: "Well, I don't like this. There must be something better than this. I'd rather try and fly 'em." So I applied for cadets and was accepted, but I had to finish this training at Keesler Field before I go. So, anyway

Colbert: Excuse me. The AM then was like aircraft maintenance?

Savage: Mechanic . . . aircraft mechanic. (Colbert: All right.) So, anyway, after I graduated from that, I wasn't a college graduate, so they sent me to the University of Alabama for six months. It's called CTD, College Training Detachment. Why, I'll never know, because we did a lot of work there and a lot of marching. We were in a parade every day, I think. (Laughing) Anyway, I finished that and went to classification at the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center. This is where they classify you for a pilot, navigator, or bombardier. So I went through all the psycho-motor tests, and all that stuff, and I qualified for bombardier and for pilot.

So you start your training right across the street from the Classification Center. You go to pre-flight. From there they send you where you want to go. Like, they were short of navigators, I mean bombardiers, and they kept saying: "Do you want to be a bombardier and go right now?" And I said: "No. I want to fly. I'm not going to ride up and drop the bombs." So, anyway, my orders finally came through and I went to primary training at Cuero, Texas, which is way down in South Texas. It was a grass field you remember. We were flying AT-17's, (PT-19). It was a little low wing trainer, just like the one out at the March Museum. (Colbert: Oh, one of those. O.K.) When I finished that I went to basic flying training at Waco, flying the BT-13. The old Vultee Vibrator they used to call it. It looks like a T-6 except the gear doesn't retract. It has a canopy instead of an open cockpit.

Colbert: How many hours would you have to have before you went from one stage to the next? Do you remember?

Savage: I don't know. Probably about sixty . . . fifty, sixty hours, something like that.

Colbert: Were you getting those hours at a pretty good clip?

Savage: Oh yeah. Fly every day, just about. And when you first went solo, you put your uniform on backwards the next day. (Laughing) When I was in primary I had a Texan . . . a big, tall, lanky Texan, and his name was Marlin Hoke. He was my instructor, and, you know, you fly around and you do all these rudder exercises . . . stalls and things like that . . . and shoot landings . . . and finally we were in a grass field shooting landings. I had a Gosport, you know. And he said: "Park over here." And, with the engine running, I parked over there and he got out on the wing and said, "Well, if you're gonna kill yourself, you're gonna do it alone." (Laughing) Thanks a lot.

Colbert: That was your solo?

Savage: That was my solo, yes. Then I went to basic training at Waco, Texas in the BT-13, which is a pretty good aircraft. A lot bigger than what we were flying. Once we got solo there . . . I used to have a buddy of mine . . . what was his name? Richard, I can't think of his last name. But anyway, he was solo too, and I said, "O.K. I'll meet you over at such and such a town and we'll chase each other around." And we'd do that for a while. I had a maneuver called a snap roll. You know what a snap roll is? (Colbert: Uh huh.) Well, this was a snap-and-a-half. I'd stop it upside down, and then roll out. Well, I got in this airplane one time that had already flown ahead of me, and I took off. And I said, "Well, it's time to try one of my snap-and-a-halves, which I did. And then I rolled it back and, as I looked down, both left and right fuel gauges read empty. They are in the cockpit. They're down below. (Colbert: Fuel gauges?) Fuel gauges, right. And I looked down there and they're both reading empty, and I said, "Holy Toledo!" I thought the plane hadn't been refueled after the kid ahead of me, so I hightailed it back to the field. It turned out that when I did that snap-and-a-half and stopped it upside down, the floats stuck in the up position . . . the empty position . . . or the down position, I guess. The empty position. So, that's all it was. Anyway, went from there to . . . oh, that's another thing. I wanted to go to Foster Field in the P-40's. T-6's and then P-40's to go into fighters.

Colbert: Where was Foster Field?

Savage: It's down in Texas, near the Gulf. Anyway, they said if you were over 5'11" you had to go to bombers. I was 6'3" or something like that, so I put down 5'11" plus. The stage commander, who was a major, was about 6'3" and weighed about 225 pounds. He came out and explained to me why I had to go to bombers. He had just come back from a tour of P-51's in Italy (laughing) so I went to twin engine advanced.

Colbert: Were the rest of your instructors all coming back from the combat zone?

Savage: Some were. He wasn't the instructor. He was the commander of the whole outfit there. But usually, in primary they were all civilian instructors. And then they got into military when they got into basic. We had nicknames for all of them, of course, but I won't get into that now. So, we went to Oklahoma. What's the name of that field? I'll think of it, Frederick, Oklahoma. Well, anyway, flying AT-17's. The Bamboo Bomber we used to call it. Twin engine – it was kind of a pain to fly.

Colbert: And was that like a primary bomber/trainer?

Savage: It was a multi-engine trainer because it had twin engines. I had about six weeks to go to graduate and they were getting too many pilots at the time. So they got a bunch of us together and fired a bunch of questions at us. Then they sent us down to Brooks Field, Texas in B-25's, which is a tactical aircraft. So we were the first cadet class to fly a tactical airplane as a cadet. Anyway, I graduated from there and went to Fort Worth, Texas, to B-24 training, which was what was in AM school, and I thought, "I'm back in those things . . . but I'm flying it this time." And that was great. I think we got eighty hours there, training, checkout, and so forth. I had about twenty hours to go and Consolidated Aircraft came out with the B-32. It was their answer to the B-29 that had come out ahead of them. They were faster in the pattern and they kind of ran us out and sent us up for the last training in Kansas.

Liberal, Kansas. Have you ever been to Liberal, Kansas? (Colbert: I've been to Liberal. Yes.) Well, we got there in the wintertime. (Colbert: Oh, geez!) Tumbleweeds and dust. Anyway, I finally finished training in B-24's. I hadn't been on leave and we were waiting to go to Lincoln to pick up our crew. But we weren't in the schedule yet, so I went home on leave. No. I take that back. I was waiting to pick up the crew and President Roosevelt died about that time. And then . . .

Colbert: You were talking about the spring of 1945? Early spring?

Savage: Real early. Then I went on leave to Manhattan Beach because I hadn't been there in about two years, and I had a week off. After three days of leave, I got a radiogram to report to Randolph Field. B-29 training. Crew training, because they were getting ready to invade Japan. So I got there and we had a pilot, co-pilot and flight engineers as a crew. At that time, flight engineers were officers on the B-29's. So, we started just shooting landings, is about all, and we were in the air. It was in the summertime, and it got so hot. We had the big engines that weren't fuel-injected and temperature was a big thing. It was overheating so much. We'd take off in the summertime there and fly for about thirty minutes at about three hundred feet off the ground, just to get the engines cool enough to close the cowl flaps so we could start climbing.

Well, anyway, I think it was twenty-six hours we were supposed to get. I had finished my last flight, my twenty-sixth hour, and somebody else was flying. They would take about three different crews up on the same flight. (Colbert: Then you swap in the air?) Yeah. So I went back in the waist and I'm laying in a gun blister, listening to the music on the radio, when they announced that they had dropped the Atomic Bomb. They let us off the base about three days and I didn't go overseas in World War II. I went into a pilot pool and then, finally, in March of '46, I got out of the service and went home to Manhattan Beach.

Colbert: Was that a voluntary decision?

Savage: No. Everybody went. So I went back to Manhattan Beach. My brother and I bought a lot and built a house on top of a hill. We had never built a house before. Anyway, we did it and it's a pretty good house. About 2,000 square feet, four bedrooms, stuff like that. Beautiful view.

Colbert: Now, was this for speculation or for you?

Savage: To live in. My dad died in '47 and my mother was still alive. I met my wife-to-be and we got married in '49. I was working at Douglas, by the way, in their experimental department. So we got married and we finished building the house. My wife was working for a stockbroker in downtown Los Angeles and things were rocking along, when all of a sudden the Korean War started.

Where was I when . . . when World War II started? Pearl Harbor. I digress a little bit. I was out on the desert hunting jackrabbits. I was just a kid, with my brother and two other kids. Anyway, I came back that Sunday and they said the war had started. We lived on top of a hill . . . kind of a hill, coming up from the beach in Manhattan Beach, and behind us, they put in a couple of spurs in there . . . railroad spurs? And they brought in these great big coast defense guns. They looked like twelve or

fourteen inch guns. Before they'd fire one of those, they'd drive through the town. "Everybody out. You have to come out."

Colbert: And this was during World War II?

Savage: Yes. Just after the war started. You could see, if you looked way out, you'd see these big targets, sticking way up, and they'd let fire with these things and they'd "shooooo" over the top of the house. Another thing . . . one night they thought they had an air raid over Los Angeles. They had anti-aircraft guns on the North American factories, the Douglas factory, and on top of it they had built what looked like a town, with netting and false buildings and everything on it, camouflage, and they had flack going off and searchlights all night long.

Colbert: That's a famous story.

Savage: Yeah. My brother was working at North American. He was on the night shift. And the only other thing I ever saw out there was, one day, in the afternoon, I heard this boom, you know, and it was where Palos Verdes point goes around towards San Pedro, and I saw a ship out there and it turned out (and pretty soon there were SDBs flying over it with depth charges on them and they were dropping them all over). Well, this turned out to be a lumber ship called the *Absoroka*, and it was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine. But it had a deck load of lumber and that kept it afloat. They just towed it around the point into San Pedro, into the harbor there, and fixed it. Well, anyway, where was I?

Colbert: You were . . . (Savage: The Korean War started.) O.K. The Korean War was just starting and you were working at Douglas.

Savage: Yes. And, by the way, I joined the reserves when I got out, so we were flying out of Long Beach. T-6's and stuff like that. They started to get some B-26's in but I was only a second or first lieutenant at the time, in the reserves, and only the "wheels" got to fly the B-26's. I think I had two hours in the thing, if I had that much. Our wing commander was a general by the name of Sweetzer. General Sweetzer. As soon as the Korean War started, he went back to Washington and said "I've got a fully combat-ready wing out here, ready to go." So they recalled the whole wing. Now I'm back in the service . . . fully combat ready. Ha!

Colbert: Did you have airplanes?

Savage: Oh, he had the airplanes. So we went out to Victorville, to George Air Force Base, and opened it up. It was closed. We were in there and Rickenbacher's old outfit, the hat and ring F-86's . . . they were in there too. So I got a fast checkout in the airplane, let me tell you. We lost several airplanes out there because we had some people from World War II that said, "Oh, here's the way we're going to do it. We're going to get line abreast, six or eight aircraft." Line abreast! Can you imagine flying that, at night? And he said: "We're going to go in and fire the rockets on the way in and the guns and drop the bombs as you go over the target." And I thought: "Jesus! Where'd they ever do this in World War II?" We had several mid-air collisions and we lost some people doing that. Well, anyway, seventy-seven days after I'm recalled, I'm sitting over the Yalu River in a B-26 saying: "What am I doing over here?" (Laughs)

Colbert: Did you fly the planes over?

Savage: Some did. I didn't get to fly one over. I went over on the *General Breckenridge*, a Navy transport.

Colbert: So, some of them flew and some of them went over on a carrier or something?

Savage: No. We went on an MST ship. A regular ship, like an ocean liner. It had a Navy crew on it but it was a MSTS, a military sea transport ship. And it took us, I think, twelve days to get to Japan. This thing was pretty good. 20,000 tons and it had twin screws. We went around two typhoons and finally hit one . . . and you talk about rough. It was about midnight when we hit this typhoon and the bow would come up out of the water and go BOOM, down in, and then the screws would come out, and they were sixteen-foot screws. And the water is what governs the speed of rotation of the screws. So they'd start speeding up and it would shake the ship like a dog shakes a rat. I mean . . . the decks were jumping about four inches up and down, and it was only quarter inch steel.

We got to Japan. Where was it? Either Sasebo . . . yeah, I think it was Sasebo. We pulled in there at night and they were trying to warp the ship up to the dock, you know, and, of course, everybody . . . all the guys . . . we had a lot of army troops plus our wing and they're all on the dockside. The thing was listing so much they had to put out a PA, "Half the people go to the other side so we can warp this thing in." That's the way it started out, anyway. The big thing was, hurry up and get a few missions in and we're going to be home by Christmas. That was the deal. We started getting missions in and we were flying them clear up to the Yalu River.

Colbert: Were you flying out of Sasebo?

Savage: No. We went over to Miho. Well, first we went to, oh, hell, what's the name of it? Itazuki. That's it. Itazuki. We flew out of there for a while and then we went up to Miho. Miho was a Japanese naval air station during World War II and it became a Kamikaze station. In fact, we lived in a great big barracks and one day a young Japanese fellow came through, selling pearls, and he was in training there to become a Kamikaze pilot when the war ended. I said, "Were you all gung-ho for that mission?" And he said, "No way!"

But anyway, we first started out, of course the Chinese weren't into it yet, but we were up on the Yalu River and they had some nice big railroad bridges, but we couldn't put a wing over Manchuria. So, to get the bridge, we'd have to come down the river and drop a thousand pound bomb and try to hit this way instead of going the way where we couldn't miss. We probably killed a lot of fish. That thousand pound bomb, you know, all our ordinance was coming out to Okinawa, it was all World War II stuff. And these bombs are RDX and the older they get, the more volatile they are. You know, touchy. And they had big yellow stripes on them. The armorers on the base were Japanese. I guess they were ex-military. And I was watching them one day and the bombs were in a six X, and they had big wooden bands. I don't know what you'd call them, guards or rings around them so they can roll. Anyway, they had a whole load of these and there were a couple of guys in the back and they'd drive along a concrete ramp and they'd get to where they were going to put one on an airplane . . . or four of them . . . and they would just roll the

bomb out of the back on to the concrete. BLAM! They'd hit the concrete and I thought, "Holy smoke! I hope they don't go off!" Anyway, we were having all kinds of targets, you know. You name it and we had it. And we were doing pretty well.

Colbert: Did you get a lot of opposition?

Savage: Not too much flack. We were all daylight. You don't see it until you fly at night and then you see a lot of it. But I'll tell you about that in a minute. We would get a few holes in now and then. One day we were going to cut the railroad line coming out of this side of the Yalu River, the main rail line, you know. But they didn't have any fins. They ran out of fins for the bombs. They had a six to fourteen second delay fuse on them because you would have to get away from them a little bit when it hit the ground, because you were dropping them at a hundred feet, right over the railroad tracks, without any fins on them. I remember dropping one, the first one, and something caught my peripheral vision, out on the right side, and I looked to the right and here's that bomb I just dropped, going into orbit, right off my right wing. You think I didn't make a hard left? That's with no fins.

Colbert: No aerodynamics . . . a bomb with no fins goes every which way.

Savage: That's right. And then I got to my, let's see, it was my 49 th mission and that was a lulu, let me tell you. We had six aircraft. We were still flying out of Miho in Japan. We hadn't gone to Pusan yet. Anyway, we had six aircraft and we were going to cut the rail line south of Sukchon and north of Sukchon, and not go over Sukchon because that's where all the flack was, they told us. Well, we went over on the deck to stay under the radar and we were spread way out. We were fifty feet off the mud flats, and it was low tide.

And you'd look up ahead and see these carts – ox carts – and these young guys out there digging clams. I guess they were clams. And they could hear us and then they'd see us coming and didn't know what to do. They'd hide behind a cart and one guy just ran and flattened on the mud flat. We weren't about to shoot at those guys because we were coming back that way, hopefully. So I was in the group of three that went north and turned around and we were coming down towards Sukchon, cutting the rail line. We had thousand pound para-demo bombs with six to fourteen second delay fuses. Parachute bombs. Which is good. And so I was the third one to come down and turn right, north of Sukchon after I dropped my bombs cutting the rail lines coming down. The first guy, by the way, you turned towards the coast again so you don't go over the city and there was a little valley there. Well, in this valley was a flack trap. They weren't so dumb. And I didn't know it, nobody knew it. Wasn't briefed. Just stay north of the city. So the first guy going through got hit with these 57 mms. He got one right through the nose but it didn't go off. It broke his windshield, but he didn't say anything. The second guy through, and remember, we were at least oh, four or five minutes behind them so you don't run into their bomb blast. So the second guy through got one right in the waist. I mean back by the gunner and it did go off, you know, he sits in this seat that's all armor plate. So here I come, fat, dumb and happy, number three. Now, they've all got the air speed we're all on, and everything else, I guess, anyway, turned right and we're strafing up a storm. Hell, we've got rockets, bombs and all this stuff. We're already getting rid of the bombs. And all of a sudden B-L-A-M! The left engine. "Geez! What was that?" It

threw my right leg off the rudder pedals. I put it back on and I looked and here comes a stream of oil or gas, or fuel, or whatever. Red and clear, coming out of the front of the cowlings and over the top. I looked and here was the oil pressure gauge and I hit on the feathering button and I just beat the oil pressure to zero. And it feathered. If it hadn't feathered, I'd still be up there. I could hear my gunner, strafing the enemy and, by the way, we had probably one of the best aircraft over there – eighteen fifty caliber guns, fourteen that I fired, and the turret, he had an upper and lower turret, had a periscope site when they'd get coming down to the bottom of the airplane, the bottom one would start shooting. He's shooting. We're all shooting and, all of a sudden BLAM, we got two more 57 mm hits and it kept throwing my foot off the rudder pedal.

Colbert: You were a single pilot?

Savage: Yes. Single controls. I'm a single pilot but sitting next to me is my navigator, Mel Wolf, who was not my regular navigator. Thank God, because my regular navigator couldn't get in the airplane by himself. Mel is a big, tough Irishman. Hell of a nice guy. He's still around. I saw him two years ago. Anyway, they had anti-ice fluid in a tank up behind the guns, but in the cockpit and they shouldn't have had alcohol in it, but it did. It blew holes in that tank and the fluid was flying all around. He's holding a map in front of my face so I could fly. I had looked down, there's a little window to see the nose gear, and all I could see was daylight. So I had no idea if the gear was in but I knew I didn't have any hydraulic pressure. What I didn't have was an airspeed indicator; it was sitting on zero. Stuff's flying around. You talk about a wild time. Anyway, it blew the gun covers off the nose where the ammunition is. We carried 6,300 rounds of 50 caliber API on this thing, and I've got to fire fourteen guns. It blew the gun covers off and I've got the left engine feathered, and we've got to go south to get to the nearest friendly base, which was Suwon. I figured Suwon would be the best one. You know where Suwon is? Just south of the Han River, not too far from the Han River, which divides North Korea and South Korea.

Colbert: So you're still in North Korea when this is going on?

Savage: Oh, way up. Sukchon, you know, almost up to the border. You know where Sukchon is. Way up there. So I'm not going to go that way. My leg's bleeding; I've got some shrapnel in it. No engine instruments; no airspeed. I'm just going to have to fly by keeping on a lot of power, and, luckily, it was daytime. There were mountains south, so we're going to go out to the coast and go down the coast, and belly in somewhere. And that's what we did. That's why we picked Suwon. So, it was a wild ride.

Colbert: So you flew mainly by manifold pressure then?

Savage: Yeah. Oh, I started to tell you, it blew the gun covers off. And you'd be flying along and all of a sudden here would come a big ammo box with a belt with a 50 caliber in it, and it would come out and go right through the prop on the right side. I looked out one time at the right engine and all I could see was where the stuff hit below and poked holes in the cowlings, and I thought I don't want to look at that anymore. But, it was running. That's the main thing. So we flew for about an hour . . . an hour-and-a-half . . . by the time we got down to Suwon. We had no radios and we couldn't receive anything because I found out the antennas were shot off. The

UHF antenna is right behind the pilot on the outside of the aircraft. That was leveled; I don't know what hit that. We had two or three times more when the ammunition boxes came up. Boy, that was a wild ride.

Colbert: Sounds like a wild ride.

Savage: Yeah. You talk about a wild ride? That was a wild ride. Anyway, we got back to Suwon. And this is where the F-86's were operating out of, the fighters. In fact, Jaberra, the first fighter ace in Korea, was there and so we had a biscuit gun with us. We're circling the airfield on one engine and, of course, they can see us, and the navigator had flares up in the gun up in the canopy. We fired red red, which means an emergency with wounded on board.

Savage: We finally got a green green light so we could come in to land. I made an approach and I told the gunner, "If you want to bail out, you can. I don't know what's gonna happen when we belly this thing in, you know." He said, "No, I'll stay with you." Well, the gun switches, the arming and the charging switches are on the overhead panel up here. When all this was going on, I'd forgotten to turn them off. On the final approach, I dumped the canopy, pulled the lever, and, geez. All the stuff that came up, you can't imagine all the stuff that came up. The wind was blowing from the bottom, hitting us in the face and everything, but that's all right.

We had been circling so long when I looked at the runway, on the left side of the runway as you're approaching it, there must have been 500 GI's. They're going to watch a crash landing, see. About three-quarters of the way down the runway, just on the right side of it, there was a truck and some Koreans were there putting tar in cracks. Well, they were way down the runway. I had no airspeed and all I knew was this thing wasn't going to stall out. So anyway, I got it down, and just as I was rounding out, the gun trigger is on the control wheel, and I still had the guns armed. "Barrroooooom!" You should have seen, you talk about Keystone Cops! You should have seen those two Koreans run – "WOOM" – into a ditch somewhere. Anyway we hit the runway and started grinding along because of the holes in the bottom of the airplane, the concrete and stuff was coming up, hitting us in the face, dust and stuff like that. And we finally slid to a stop and I looked out and there wasn't a soul in sight.

Colbert: They're all gone.

Savage: Anyway, so, without the gear down or anything else, you can just about step onto the ground from an A-26 or B-26. My gunner got there and they had an ambulance come out and meet us. And the navigator, this big Mel Wolf, the big Irishman, his eyes were shut, from being burned by the alcohol and de-icing fluid. We had shoulder holster 45's, and some of the guys who met us, tried to talk Mel Wolf out of his 45. I don't know what the medics wanted it for. And he said, "No." And another guy came up and turned to one guy and said, "You know, that's the way combat affects some people. They just break down completely." Well, his eyes were running so bad from the stuff burning his eyes, and he couldn't see, but he was so mad, he was gonna kill the guy. They threw us into the ambulance and took us over to the flight surgeon. They had a flight surgeon there, and I'm not sure about this guy. You know how we wear combat fatigues over there? Well, this guy had gotten a hold of a parachute silk and it was summer. August.

Colbert: He wore it like an ascot?

Savage: Oh, yeah, like a big scarf. And I thought, "Naaahh." (Colbert: F-86 guy?) No! This was the flight surgeon. He had nothing to do with flying F-86's. Anyway, we went in there and they started cutting my flying suit, etc., off and I said, "Where's the medicinal whiskey?" and he said, "Sit down. You're going into shock." And I said, "Where's the medicinal whiskey?" They had it. That's a regulation in the Air Force. I guess in the Marines, too. You have it and it's bottled and bond stuff, you know. Finally they brought me the bottle and I was sitting there while they were cutting off my stuff. Anyway, they took a look at my leg, and it was just a couple of holes where the shrapnel went in. So they put some bandages around it and stuck me on a bed. Then they had a "gooney bird" going back to Miho and we all got on that and went back, the same day.

Colbert: Now, you said that was your forty-ninth mission. How many were you normally required to fly? (Savage: Fifty-five.) Did you finish out your fifty-five?

Savage: Yep, I sure did. In fact, they had me in the infirmary. We had a little hospital there at Miho. Anyway, I had six more to go and it was about this time we moved over to Pusan.

Colbert: So you moved from Japan into South Korea?

Savage: Yeah. Into Pusan and the flight surgeon had me in that little hospital there, and he went on a trip somewhere, so I thought, "I'm gonna get out of here." So I did. I checked myself out or whatever. There wasn't much checking out. You just go. So I got the rest of my missions in, I guess, well, not before he got back. He was kind of mad, but what was he gonna do? So I got my fifty-five in.

Colbert: Did you also have a calendar number of months to stay, or once you got your missions in . . . ?

Savage: No. Once you got your missions in, you were just waiting for a replacement, and that took about three months. So anyway, so much for Korea.

Colbert: So when did you come back then?

Savage: Well, I came back in ... I was over there ten months, so, let's see, I went over in December and I came back in October. (Colbert: Of '51?) Yes.

Colbert: So, you were the first bunch over there?

Savage: Oh, we got over there and we were in the reserves and we had blue uniforms. Can you believe this? The nearest U.S. Air Force or Army Air Corps it was at that time. They didn't have their blue uniforms yet. So, we're in the reserves over there and we can't wear our blue uniforms because the regular Air Force doesn't have them yet. Crazy, huh?

Colbert: (Laughing) So you came back and picked up Margie, your wife, and then where did you go?

Savage: Well, we had gone to San Francisco; she picked me up at Travis. On the way up on our honeymoon we had stopped. I was telling you about digging clams at Pismo Beach, and we stopped on the way back, and then I found out I was reassigned to Mather Field flying B-25's. That's my first assignment when I got back. And what it was, we were flying what they called triple headed guys. What it was, was in the back they had radar and all that stuff, and these were SAC guys. At first they were training to be navigator, bombardier and pilot; I think they had to learn all three things. And we were flying them in the back of B-25's using Stockton as a bunch of targets down there. And it got pretty boring, you know. I got so I really knew the targets, which were warehouses, and they'd say, "O.K. Follow the PDI (Pilot Direction Indicator)." And I'd say, "O.K." We'd fly 'em and I'd go right over the target and the instructor back there'd say, "You sure you're flying the PDI?" and I'd say, "Yeah, yeah." They're bombing by radar.

We had one incident there. Not at Travis. We were at Mather Field and they had the safety record in the Air Force. Well, one day, I'm up flying in the B-25 and they said to land at McClellan. And the base is closed. And what happened? They had a young second lieutenant flying a B-25 around on a test hop. This was at Mather. His oil pressure dropped a little bit on one engine. Instead of coming in and landing it, he feathered it, which was all right, but he didn't keep his airspeed up coming in. And so what happened?

He was starting to drift off to the side of the runway, and instead of landing right beside the side of the runway, it was all flat dirt, he decides to go around. I guess he had a little cross wind. So he poured the coal to it. He didn't get the drag off, the gear up, the flaps up and he didn't keep the nose down, so the torque got him. He came down on top of the guardhouse. Well, of course, they had fire trucks in there. They lost several prisoners in there and some of them were burned very badly, 'cause everything was burning. I didn't find this out until we had landed at McClellan. We were living across the field at Mather. We had a house over there and, of course, my wife was wondering what happened. She drove across the base but they wouldn't let her go near the guardhouse. And this pilot, I guess it knocked him out or something, and they had him stretched out there and . . .

Colbert: But he survived the crash?

Savage: Oh, yeah. He survived. He had a sunburn, but several people, some of the prisoners, didn't and some of the guys really got burned badly, you know, trying to get them out of there. Not prisoners, some of the people. There was one guy that had gone by there and he said to my wife, "I don't know what happened, but they've got a guy stretched out and it looks like your husband." Can you imagine that?

Colbert: That's a nice thing to tell her.

Savage: Yeah. Isn't that something? Anyway, on the way over there I saw the . . . what the heck's that monstrous airplane? They took a B-36 and made a cargo version out of it (XC-99). Did you ever see it? (Colbert: Oh, yeah, yeah.) Pusher props. That was fun. And I watched it land. When it lands, a ladder comes out of the bottom and a guy climbs down the ladder with a headset on. He's the engineer and he's clearing the wing tips and everything else, while the pilot taxis in. So, anyway, that went on for a while and then they started up a B-26 crew-training school at Perrin Field, Texas.

Colbert: Had there been any effort for you to go back to civilian life? Or had you indicated that you wanted to stay in the Air Force?

Savage: Oh, I could have gone back. In fact, a friend of mine said, "Come on. Let's go in the airlines." I said, "No, I don't want to. I'm having too much fun in the Air Force." He became a big TWA captain, I guess. He had bought a great big steel hull fishing boat and he was commercial fishing tuna off of South America. I haven't seen him at any of the reunions, so I don't know what happened to him. But I stayed in. We went down to Perrin Field and were checking out the students in B-26's because the war heated up in Korea pretty much. They needed pilots so we went down there for a while.

They had F-86's there and they were kind of running us out of the pattern, being a jet, you know. So they sent us up to Enid, Oklahoma, which was an advance-training base for B-25's. I think it had a 4,500-foot runway or something like that. Well, the minimum for a B-26 was supposed to be 5,500 feet, but that didn't make any difference. So we had to get checked out in the B-25's too. I don't know why. It's the easiest airplane I have ever flown. Anyway, we were instructing in B-26's and we had all kinds of students. I had Arabian students and United States students. They'd graduate in B-25's, come down to us, and we'd take them up in B-26's. They had always heard all kind of bad things about the B-26's, you know. They might have been thinking of the World War II B-26, which was called the Flying Prostitute or the Widow Maker. That was just an air speed thing, not keeping air speed up.

So we would take them up on a familiarization ride, get them in the right seat, show them what it was like, and we'd go up, I don't know, 10,000 feet and drop the gear and the flaps. We'd feather one engine and we'd just pull it up into a stall and hold it into a stall and all that. They'd think it's gonna flip over on its back. That was a tremendous airplane, the B-26's, let me tell you. It's fast. It's about the same speed as a P-51, and we carried a load over in Korea equal to six P-51's. We had a combination of bombs in the bomb bay; you could carry thousand pounders. There were four of them in the bomb bay. We carried four thousand pounds of bombs. (Colbert: Wow!) Under the wings, you had fourteen, six-and-a-half inch shaped charge rockets, the one they designed to go through tanks and stuff like that, seven under each wing. They had a 110-gallon tank of Napalm under each wing and, as I said, they had the guns. If you had a hard nose like I had, you had 6,300 rounds of API.

Colbert: So you carried as much as the B-17 did or more. (Savage: More.) I'll be darned. But with only three crew members?

Savage: Yeah. Well, two really. The navigator, but single control. We had a couple dual controls when I was there instructing in them, and they just put simple wheel and yolk in there and rudder pedals. No brakes, nothing. So, anyway, that went on for a while, and then I got orders to go overseas to England. And I had to go to what they called Bomb Commander School down at San Antonio, which was the Atomic Bomb. We had to learn because they were carrying the *Fat Man*, no, not the *Fat Man*. We were carrying the Mark 5, I guess. But we learned about the *Fat Man*, you know, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, *Little Boy* and *Fat Man*. Anyway, I went to that school. Then I had to go to JQC, Jet Qualification Course, and that was in Louisiana at Sellman Field. When I went to Bomb Commander School, I had gone home on leave to Manhattan Beach. I left the family there and went to Randolph and finished that

course. Then I had to go down to Sellman Field. I had to check out in T-Birds anyway, so I picked up my wife to go down there, and it was pretty good.

Colbert: Did you have kids by then?

Savage: Yeah, two. A boy and a girl. The boy, Rick, is now a physicist. He works for Cal Tech on a project called LIGO in Washington. Actually, it's on the old, what's that big property up there? Where they built the Atomic Bomb? Anyway, our daughter is a schoolteacher in Riverside. (Colbert: Hanford?) Yeah. On the Hanford site. That's actually where they built it. Anyway, I checked out in T-Birds, T-33's, and then we drove to New Orleans and looked around. You know, we had a little vacation. We had a week to get to New York and when we got there, then I had about another week to spend before we were going over by ship.

Can you believe that? (Colbert: To England?) England. Yeah. I hadn't even seen the airplane. A B-45 is what it turned out to be. Anyway, the ship we went on was the *Private Thomas*, 7,800 tons, wringing wet. We went out on the dock and you didn't look up. You looked down at the ship, a little MSTS ship. We crossed the Atlantic in December and got there, oh, three days before Christmas. There was only one day in that whole crossing, it took eight or nine days, I think, that you could walk without holding on with one hand on that ship, and that was when we hit the Gulf Stream.

Colbert: Did you go to a British air base or an American air base?

Savage: British, an RAF Station, Sculthorpe, up on the wash, and West Raynem was right next-door to it. You know where West Raynem is? That's like going out where Edwards is to their Air Force. (Colbert: Was it a nice tour of duty for the family?) Oh, yeah. There was another couple. Our kids were so small. Rick had just started to walk when we were checking out in T-Birds, so he was just a little kid. Sue was a year older. So we left them with a nanny and we toured Norway, Sweden and Denmark with another couple from the base, for twelve or fourteen days. It was great. Then we took another trip all through Europe, all the way down to Italy, France, Germany, top of the Zugspitze, places like that. Really great.

Anyway, we were flying the B-45's for three years and they were converting to the B-66's and my squadron commander said, "You want to extend?" and I said, "No. I don't want to. I want to put my three years in and go home." So I didn't get in the B-66. Just the B-45, which is a very, very good airplane. It was the first jet bomber. Actually, performance-wise, it would out-climb just about anything 'cause it had a big, straight wing. You could level out with a full load and a 3,500-pound bomb in the thing. We had a shape . . . a concrete shape . . . we used to drop them in northern Germany. Once a year we had to drop one of those things. Anyway, you could level off at 45,000 feet with a full load of fuel. On the B-47, same configuration, it's about 28,500 feet. So you see the difference. It wasn't quite as fast and it didn't have the legs.

Colbert: Who made the B-45's?

Savage: North American. (Colbert: North American?) Yeah. That's why SAC got rid of them and flew the B-47. The B-47 is a heck of an airplane. It was designed max gross weight 125,000 pounds, fuel and everything, and we were sitting on alert with them at Pease at 215,000 pounds with a horse collar rack of 20 or 40 ATO bottles.

Colbert: Did they ever upgrade the engines from the original design?

Savage: Not on the B-47. They had on the B-52.

Colbert: Now, what rank were you by then? Were you a major? Captain? Major?

Savage: I don't know. I'm trying to think here I was. O.K. Pease, yeah. I was a major. In fact, towards the end of it, I was in the 100 th Bomb Wing. I became the head of standardization board, the B-47 standardization board there. We had tankers too, just before they folded the wing. SAC folded up all the B-47's. We were in the 100 th Bomb Wing and we were the last bomb wing to fold, so I had a Spot LC at the time.

Well, anyway, they told us: "Where do you want to go?" I said, "Well, I want to be stationed in California. I've been in the service a long time and I've never really been stationed there, except for that little stint at Mather when I got back from Korea." So they said, "O.K. What do you want?" I said, "I want to go to McClellan and get in those WB-47's." They had Weather B-47's there that were flying. I said, "I'm a current IP in the aircraft and all I've got to do is go down and take a standardization board and I'm flying." So they sent me to California, but not to Mather, I mean, not to McClellan. They sent me about 60 miles down the road to Travis. And do you know what they stuck me in? C-124. Old Shaky. I couldn't believe that airplane. I said, "What are you doing? I haven't flown a prop job in twelve years!" They said, "Oh, that's all right. We need you."

I found out later that MAC needed all the SAC guys for one reason. That was to buffer their people so their people didn't have to go overseas to Vietnam. That's exactly what it was. A rotten deal. Anyway, I think I moved four times in six months. I moved out there to an apartment in Vacaville. I moved from there to a house in Vacaville. (Colbert: Was your family with you?) Yeah. And from there, on to the base at Travis and I thought, "Boy, this is going to be great." Then I got orders to go over to Vietnam and I'm back off the base. So that makes four times. You know you're not supposed to get more than one PCS (permanent change of station) in the Air Force per year. So what they did was a little illegal. Anyway, they sent me to Vietnam and I said, "What am I going to be doing?" They said, "Well, we don't know yet."

We got orders to go to Fighter Weapons School at Nellis. So we went there and boy, we got a great course. Staff Operations Course is what it was. And that was great. We found out exactly what was going on in Vietnam. They had just come out with what we called the Wild Weasel. Did you ever hear of the Wild Weasel? (Colbert: No.) I think they got that thing, they designed it and had it in production in something like three weeks and in Vietnam in about three weeks because the SAM missiles were pretty bad. Anyway, I went over and I said: "What are we going to be doing?" "Well," they said, "We don't know. You're going to some outfit over at Ton Son Nuit." Ton Son Nuit was the airbase right out of, what do they call it? Ho Chi Minh City now, but it was Saigon then.

So there were several of us going on this thing and we get to Clark Field and they said we had to go to survival school at Clark. (Colbert: Friendly survival?) Yes. So I thought, "Well, I'd already been to the SAC Survival School up at Reno and that's something." So one of the guys said, "What are we going to be doing over there?" He calls somewhere, some headquarters, and found out we were not going to be going into a flying job over there. We were going to be in Command Post type stuff. So we found out we didn't have to go to the jungle survival. What a shame. I really missed that. (Laughing)

So we get to Saigon and we don't know what we're going to do and we mill around a little bit. Finally, after about a week, they called us in and said, "Well, we need a man for Da Nang, and a man for Cam Rahn Bay." As soon as he said 'Cam Rahn Bay', I thought, "Ahhh, the ocean. You know, South China Sea," and I said, "Well, I like to swim and I'll go to Cam Rahn" and this other guy, a buddy of mine, said, "I like to swim, too." So I said, "O.K. We'll flip a coin." Well, he lost. He went to Da Nang and, oh, man, they got rocketed quite a bit. We were at Cam Rahn. We never got anything at Cam Rahn. We never got anything in Cam Rahn. The Army did, across the peninsula, but we never did get it there. You could hear them firing all night long. H and I, harassment and interdiction, they call it.

Colbert: So that is really your first non-flying job in all those years in the Air Force? (Savage: The only time I hadn't been in a flying job.) You were really fortunate. (Savage: I guess so.) Yeah, because you like to fly.

Savage: Yeah, well, I do. I wanted to fly but what am I gonna do? Anyway, I put in a year there and that was, well, I told you about going up with the Marines, up in, (Colbert: Dong Ha.) Dong Ha, yeah. That was strange. That was a week-and-a-half before I was going home. I was supposed to be a current IP in that aircraft. I went up there as a mission commander-resupply of the First Marine Troop. Three thousand troops coming in on 130's. I said, "Hey, you've gotta be a current IP in the 130. I've never flown one." They said, "That doesn't make a difference. Go on."

That's where we were living. I told you about the type of shack which was supposed to be our quarters. Just one, and all around it they had all these sandbags and they had a jeep, a radio and everything outside, and mics inside of the sandbags. So I said, "Where will we sleep?" And this young man says, "Oh, in there." I go in there and almost fall in this hole. They had tunneled down through the concrete floor and they had a great big room down below there. That's where they were sleeping. They weren't about to sleep up there. And that's when the Vietnamese had some kind of a high velocity artillery. I don't know what, you problem know what it was.

Colbert: Those were the, yeah, I guess they could fire on Dong Ha from North Vietnam.

Savage: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Only six miles. It had a very flat trajectory, just a "woosh," "boom." None of this "woop, woop, woop." We heard a few of those going, but all night long, they're giving H and I outgoing. And they finally got rid of all the Vietnamese on the base. Civilians working there because they lost all our helicopters and they lost the ammo dump, the fuel dump and everything else. They figured out that the workers on the base were walking them off and giving them the coordinates, I guess. Anyway, that was kind of interesting. And we got 'em all in there and then we came back. And when we came back, oh, I forgot to tell you, you were in

Vietnam? Didn't you have, after six months, you go back to Hawaii for a week?
(Colbert: R&R, yeah.)

I did that too. Margie and the kids flew over and we stayed with a real good friend of ours on the base there. I have to tell you this, this guy was the director of material at, what is it? PACF? That's at Hickham. And he went to a staff meeting one day and the general, I think it was Jack Ryan, three finger, I think it was Jack Ryan. I don't remember, but, anyway, he had the morning briefing, and before the man could give the briefing, this general got up and said, "I want everybody to listen to this and I don't want to hear one word 'til the briefing is over." So this guy started. Seems like there was a colonel and he got injured and was in the hospital. He had a broken leg. And this is a true story. These guys, had two story BOQ (quarters). Well, so he was a colonel and he had one of those. And he would like to come home about 10 o'clock and read the newspaper and do his constitutional, and stuff like that. And he was a cigar smoker. Well, his wife, after he left to go to work in the morning, had cleaned the john with gasoline, and it was still in there. He was a big cigar smoker.

Well, anyway, to make a long story short, he's up there, sitting there, reading his newspaper, and as soon as he finished his cigar, he drops it in there and there was a big explosion. Blew him off the john, see? And he's all burned on his chest and everything else. What happened then was two-hospital corpsmen went up there to get him with a stretcher. They got him on the stretcher and he was just burned. I told you he was in the hospital with a broken leg. Well, what happened was they asked him, "What happened?" and he was telling them, and they got to laughing so much going down the stairs, they dropped him and he broke his leg. And that's a true story. (Laughing)

Well, anyway I went back and I spent a year there. When I came back I put in, and I said, "Ahhh, I'm gonna get into those 135's that they're flying now." You know, the 135 is like flying a T-6. You ever see the instrument panel on the 135? (Colbert: Yeah. Isn't it simple?) Oh, it's so simple you can't believe it, you know. They're tankers so it's not like the B-52, let me tell you. So I thought, "Ahhh, I'll put in for that." So I put in for the SAM KC-135. The SAM mission at Langley. You know, Special Air Mission. You fly the congressmen all around, like at Christmas time, they go over, (Colbert: Andrews, too.) Yeah. Andrews. All right.

So they said, "Well, you can go to SAC, but you're going in a B-52." And I said, "Hah." So, that's what I did. I came back to the B-52 and got checked out in the "aluminum overcoat" and we went for about a year. Then I lucked out and got transferred over to Norton, flying 141's. This was like flying an airliner, compared to that. It had the same power in four engines as the B-52's had in eight, so you can imagine. You take off in that and it pushes you back in the seat all the time. You can take off fully loaded on three engines, easy. That's the difference in the thrust. So, where were we?

Colbert: At Norton, flying 141's there.

Savage: Yeah. Then I retired on July the first, out of Norton, and I had what, twenty-four years.

Colbert: You sure got to fly a lot of airplanes.

Savage: Oh, well, yeah. There's a lot I didn't tell you about either. (Laughing)

Colbert: How many total hours did you end up with?

Savage: Right around 9,000, something like that. I don't know. I'd have to look it up.

Colbert: I'll be dog-goned. So you retired at Norton and you had a house here in Riverside?

Savage: Yeah. A big PCS. When I got back from Vietnam I bought this, I said, "I can't afford that." That house on Country Club Drive, you know. It's 2,000 square feet, four bedrooms, big view and all that. And they wanted, what did they want? They wanted \$34,600 for that house. (Laughing) "I can't afford that!" And I said, "Well, the kids will be going to Poly." Then I said, "Oh, I can afford this." So we bought it. Pretty smart move. The only smart move I think I ever made in the Air Force. But, anyway, that was it. Then I got out in '70 and I went ... I had a boat. I still have it. Inboard-outboard. And I thought: "I've got to catch up." And I went fishing for almost a year to catch up. My boy and I would go. We were launching at Dana Point and, of course, the freeways weren't crowded then. They weren't crowded then like they are now. We would take off real early and we'd launch at Dana Point. Then they only had the breakwater there and a launch ramp, and we'd go out and we were catching fish. We got blue fin tuna and we got all kinds of fish.

Colbert: Now, we're about to end up here. That's a full hour of conversation with Dick Savage.

Savage: Oh, I didn't tell you. They gave me a big medal when I got back. (Colbert: Oh, O.K.) Yeah. We were at Travis. I mean, it was Mather when we got back. One day the wing commander called us in ... a bunch of us who had come back from Korea, and he didn't know what the medals were. This guy, he didn't know what medals were. So he gives this friend of mine a DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross) and he gave me this one. It's a DSC (Distinguished Service Cross), not the DFC. The number two medal. That was for that hairy mission of mine, you know. And he said: "Look at this one!" (Laughing) That was too much.

Colbert: Thank you for participating in this important project and for sharing your military experiences. Your interview will be reviewed, and you will receive your own copy. Copies of today's interview will be placed in the Riverside Public Library as well as in the Library of Congress in the archives of the National Veterans History Project. This concludes the interview.